Iran ranks among world's top five producers of eight farm products, FAO data show



Economy Desk

Iran ranked among the world's five largest producers of eight agricultural products in 2024 despite water shortages and prolonged drought, while earning $1.15 billion from exports of five major farm commodities, according to data from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), cited by the Iranian economic news outlet Eqtesad-e Moaser.

The figures also show that Iran was the world's second-largest exporter of pistachios and dates and the leading exporter of figs during the year.

Pistachios were Iran's biggest agricultural export earner in 2024, generating $636 million, double the $317 million recorded in 2023. The country exported 98,000 tons of the product, making it the world's second-largest exporter after the United States, which shipped 348,000 tons.

Iran ranked third in global pistachio production, with output rising 3% to 316,000 tons from 307,000 tons a year earlier. The United States led production with 498,000 tons, followed by Turkey with 383,000 tons. Iran had ranked second in 2023 but fell behind Turkey despite increasing its output.

Dates were the country's second-largest agricultural export earner, bringing in $172 million in 2024, down 14% from the previous year.

Iran exported 315,000 tons of dates, ranking second globally behind Saudi Arabia, which shipped 351,000 tons. It was also the world's fourth-largest producer, with output rising 18% to 1.182 million tons. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Algeria ranked ahead of Iran.

Apples ranked third among Iran's agricultural export earners, with exports worth $130 million in 2024, half the value recorded a year earlier. Iran exported $280 million worth of apples in 2023, when it ranked ninth among the world's largest exporters.

Despite the decline in export earnings, Iran's apple production rose 11% to 2.346 million tons in 2024, making it the world's seventh-largest producer.

Iran was the world's largest fig exporter, shipping about 14,000 tons worth $18 million in 2024, according to FAO data. It ranked fifth in global fig production, with output increasing 3% to around 75,000 tons.

Butter and raisins were Iran's fourth- and fifth-largest agricultural export earners, respectively, generating $112 million and $99 million during the year. Saffron, another major Iranian export, is not included in the FAO figures cited in the report.

Beyond its leading export commodities, Iran held several other high global rankings in agricultural production.

The country was the world's fourth-largest producer of apricots and walnuts in 2024, harvesting 304,000 tons of apricots and 411,000 tons of walnuts. Walnut production increased 8% from about 380,000 tons in 2023.

Iran ranked fifth globally in the production of cherries, sour cherries and kiwifruit. Cherry output fell 5% to 137,000 tons, while sour cherry production edged up by 1,000 tons to 136,000 tons. Kiwifruit production reached 294,000 tons.

The FAO data also placed Iran sixth in almond production, with 132,000 tons in 2024, and seventh in apple and peach production.

Russian firm receives additional 37 km of key North-South rail corridor project

Economy Desk

Iran has signed an agreement to hand over an additional 37 kilometers of the Rasht-Astara railway project to Russia's Caspian Service company, bringing the total length of the route delivered to the firm to 162 km, as the two countries step up cooperation on the strategic rail link.

The agreement was signed as part of ongoing efforts to complete the railway, a key component of the North-South rail corridor, according to ILNA.

Houshang Bazvand, head of Iran's Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructure Company and a deputy roads minister, said speeding up construction of the Rasht-Astara line was a priority for the president and the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development.

He described the project as strategically important to bilateral relations with Russia and a significant milestone in international cooperation on regional transport infrastructure.

A previous agreement signed last year covered the handover of 125 km of the route. The latest 37-km addition brings the total to 162 km.

Bazvand said the progress would pave the way for larger commercial agreements and diplomatic and economic visits in the near future to finalize further deals.

He also said technical studies were being carried out carefully inside Iran, with qualified domestic contractors available to carry out the construction work. He added that there were no major obstacles or concerns over the project's implementation.



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Alongside the route handover agreement, the two sides signed a separate contract for geotechnical studies to assess geological and infrastructure conditions along the route and provide a sound technical basis for the work.

A director of Caspian Service said the Russian side was ready to advance the studies as quickly as possible. Ten geotechnical drilling teams are currently working along the route, he said.

He also praised the quality and technical expertise of Iranian consultants, expressing hope that the completion of field studies would pave the way for finalizing the contract.

Technical, engineering services exports rise 130% under current administration: *TPO*

Economy Desk

Iran's exports of technical and engineering services have increased 130% over the past two years under the Pezeshkian administration, which took office in August 2024, Deputy Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Mohammad Ali Dehqan-Dehnavi said.

Speaking at a meeting with members of the Iranian Association of Exporters of Technical and Engineering Services, Dehghan Dehnavi said the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) was following up on exporters' foreign exchange and banking problems with the Central Bank, IRNA reported.

He said Iran had considerable technical knowledge, engineering expertise and specialized companies capable of expanding the country's target markets, increasing services exports and raising the sector's share of non-oil exports.

Dehqan-Dehnavi cited challenges facing exporters, including difficulties in the Iraqi market, bank guarantees and foreign exchange obligations. He said the TPO would pursue solutions with the central bank and other relevant agencies.

He added that a Supreme Export Council had been established at the TPO on the president's instructions to remove obstacles and strengthen exporters' capabilities. The president had also made commitments to address problems facing these companies during National Export Day, and following up on their implementation was on the TPO's agenda.

In April, Amir Roshanbakhsh, a TPO deputy, reported a 140% increase in Iran's exports of technical and engineering services in the fiscal year that began on March 21, 2025, compared with the previous year.

He said exports of technical and engineering services had reached $1.8 billion in that fiscal year, while other services exports totaled $1.2 billion, bringing combined services exports to about $3 billion. In the preceding fiscal year, exports of technical and engineering services stood at about $790 million, while other services exports were around $400 million.

Roshanbakhsh said the sector's exports remained below the country's potential and that, with greater attention and planning, Iran could aim to increase technical and engineering services exports to $5 billion.

China's chances of ...

Important transport and connectivity networks have existed for decades, both during the Soviet era and since its collapse in 1991. They have gradually been developed and strengthened within the framework of reviving the Iranian Silk Road, the North-South Corridor and the ECO Southern Corridor. Iran's railway network connects a vast geographical area, stretching from the borders with Turkey, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea and Central Asia to Afghanistan, and extending southward to the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean.

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At the same time, it is important to recognize that the US naval blockade has also prompted Iran to expand its economic diplomacy, develop transport infrastructure, strengthen its northern ports and streamline customs procedures. Nevertheless, infrastructure limitations, transport costs and sanctions have restricted the extent to which northern routes can fully replace southern ones.

On the other hand, these countries need diverse and reliable routes to access global markets, and Iran can offer them a suitable gateway to open waters. However, regional insecurity and concerns over sanctions may push them toward alternative routes, such as the Middle Corridor. These developments therefore present Iran with a strategic opportunity, but capitalizing on it depends on ensuring transit security, reducing costs, maintaining regulatory stability and building mutual trust. Lasting cooperation can only take shape when the economic and security interests of all parties are served.

However, the pressure exerted by the US on these governments should not be overlooked. Regional governments face considerable constraints. All of them maintain extensive relations with the US and Western countries, as well as with Israel. Their official policy is generally to maintain relations with all sides, from Russia and China to Iran and Turkey, as well as Western countries. Nevertheless, their vulnerability to US pressure can sometimes constitute a major constraint.

Overall, shared opposition to US unilateralism does not necessarily translate into a political alliance or unrestricted economic cooperation. To capitalize on the potential of Russia and Central Asia, Iran needs to focus on shared interests, long-term projects, trade facilitation and the creation of mutual economic interdependence, while also remaining aware of the practical limitations of such an approach. This is because the way states operate in the international system is always more complicated than the agreements they reach or the statements their officials make.

Given the competition between Russia, China, Turkey and other regional players in Central Asia and the Caucasus, what opportunities and constraints does Iran face in seeking to strengthen its position in the region?

Since the Central Asian and Caucasus countries gained independence, extensive competition has emerged among regional and global powers across Eurasia. This rivalry, particularly between the West and Russia, has been a greater source of tensions, crises and wars than competition involving other powers. The war in Georgia during the first decade of the 21st century, followed by the war in Ukraine, has been a consequence of the West's expansionist policies in the region, to which Russia has responded by pushing back against what it considers a threat to its security interests. From the outset, the Islamic Republic of Iran has also been sensitive to Western presence and influence along its 3,000-kilometer northern borders and has sought to coordinate with Russia and regional countries in responding to these moves.

In any case, Central Eurasia holds considerable importance in Iran's foreign policy because of its geopolitical position and the competition among regional and global powers. The presence of Russia, China, Turkey and the US in these areas creates both opportunities for expanding cooperation and constraints on Iran's efforts to increase its influence.

Iran's most significant advantage is its geographical position and transit potential. Through the development of the North-South Corridor, expansion of railway links, energy cooperation and the facilitation of trade, Iran has sought to connect Central Asian countries to the Persian Gulf and global markets. Historical and cultural ties with countries in the region, along with their need for diverse trade routes, have also created favorable conditions for expanding economic relations.

Nevertheless, Iran faces significant constraints. US sanctions, banking difficulties, a shortage of foreign investment and weaknesses in some transport infrastructure undermine the country's economic competitiveness. By contrast, China has extensive financial resources and economic capacity, Russia has historical and security ties in the region, and Turkey has strong trade relations and access to European markets, giving them effective tools to expand their influence.

Of course, competition among these powers does not necessarily mean that Iran will be sidelined. In some cases, it can also create opportunities for multilateral cooperation and strengthen Tehran's bargaining position.

In my view, the two main factors that have constrained Iran's Eurasian strategy are, first and foremost, US and Western sanctions pressure and, secondly, the weakness of Iran's private sector. Throughout these years, both factors have played a significant role in limiting Iran's economic initiatives in the region and undermining its position in regional economic relations. At present, China, Russia and Turkey are the region's main economic partners, followed by some European countries, while Iran plays a more limited role.

Could current developments lead to stronger regional cooperation and the emergence of more sustainable economic arrangements between Iran and its northern neighbors, or will conflicting interests and the political considerations of these countries stand in the way of such a prospect?

The war against Iran and the blockade have made the importance of, and opportunities for, regional cooperation across Eurasia more apparent to our country. Naturally, the naval blockade of Iran's ports has heightened the strategic importance of cooperation with northern countries and Asian partners. As a result, developing land-based and regional routes has become an economic and geopolitical necessity.

Under these circumstances, Iran's membership in organizations such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization provides platforms that can help reduce the country's economic vulnerability. BRICS offers opportunities for discussions on settling transactions in national currencies, banking cooperation and expanding trade relations. The SCO, meanwhile, can help strengthen Iran's ties with Russia, China and Central Asia, particularly in transport, energy and overland trade.

Nevertheless, we must be fully aware that membership in these organizations does not, in itself, mean the lifting of sanctions or guarantee economic and military support from their members. Russia and China have strategic considerations regarding the expansion of US influence across Eurasia and may view closer cooperation with Iran as a means of maintaining the regional balance of power. However, their interests do not fully coincide with those of Tehran. China depends on energy security and uninterrupted maritime shipping, while Russia has its own independent security and economic priorities. Therefore, expecting unlimited support from these countries would be unrealistic.

Ultimately, the current crisis can strengthen regional cooperation, provided that Iran makes use of its shipping and transport capacities in the Caspian Sea, the North-South Corridor, its railway network and trade agreements to diversify its trade routes. The sustainability of this process depends on joint investment, workable financial mechanisms and the management of differences, rather than merely on shared concerns over US influence.